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Published February 23, 2007

Emotions took toll on all in Ricky case

Judge: Viewing evidence 'difficult for me as a mom'

By Samantha Meinke
Special to the Lansing State Journal

Today

- Key players in Lisa Holland's murder trial will discuss the case again from noon to 2 p.m. in the sixth-floor auditorium at Cooley Law School's Temple Building, 217 S. Capitol Ave., Lansing.

A packed crowd turned out Thursday evening to gain insight into the Ricky Holland murder trial from the attorneys and judges who tried it.

"Even though we get to read about this in the press, we never get a chance to see what they're thinking behind the scenes," said Jason Maus, a second-year Michigan State University law student. "I thought this was excellent."

Maus and the rest of the crowd at MSU's College of Law learned how members of the legal teams who handled the case dealt with the emotional stress brought on by the trial.

"Looking at a child's remains - we're human beings, just like the rest of you," said Rosemarie Aquilina, presiding judge of the case's preliminary hearing. "It was very difficult for me as a mom to view the evidence and then take those emotions out and make a ruling.

"Judges are given more vacation time than I can ever use in my life."

Matt Caswell, Ricky's biological father, learned about the human side of the legal professionals involved.

"I actually heard what the attorneys and the judges had to go through to bring my son to justice," he said.

Lisa Holland is serving a life sentence for the death of her 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky. Her husband, Tim Holland, was sentenced to 30 to 60 years in prison; he pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and testified against his wife.

Ricky was reported missing from his family's Williamston home on July 2, 2005, but testimony during Lisa Holland's six-week trial revealed he died the previous evening. He likely succumbed to a severe head injury inflicted about a week before he died, when Lisa Holland hit him with a tack hammer.

Hundreds of local law enforcement officials and residents spent countless hours searching for Ricky during the summer and fall.

During the symposium Thursday, Mike Ferency, assistant prosecuting attorney for the state of Michigan said he sensed the Hollands were involved right from the beginning.

"I concluded they were guilty probably in August" of 2005, he said. "With the cynic's mind that I have, I began to peel away the reasonable and logical explanations of this. And then it was just a matter of finding proof in bringing this case forward."

In January 2006, Tim Holland led police to Ricky's remains, which he had dumped near Dans-ville.

"I was one of the six people present when the remains were found," Ferency said.

"Emotionally, I had to take that away and proceed with a tragic case in a way that was responsible and was not personally involving me, and that was a very difficult task."

Lisa's trial began Sept. 18, 2006; she was found guilty in late October. She is appealing her conviction.

On Thursday evening, Andrew Abood, a Lisa Holland defense attorney, said he was not surprised that the public was riveted and that the media ate up and served every detail.

"It was a media circus from July 2," Abood said. "Thinking the attorneys could influence the public's opinions on this case would be like standing on the beach when the tsunami was coming with a teacup."

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Parents plead no contest in abuse case

Thursday, February 22, 2007

From News staff reports

A Canton couple has been sentenced in the abuse of their infant son.

The boy's father, Steven Michael Szyszkowski, 26, pleaded no contest to a reduced charge of second-degree child abuse, and was sentenced to one to four years in prison. He had been charged with first-degree child abuse, a 15-year felony.

His 5-week-old son was taken to Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor with nine broken bones in December.

The baby's mother, Beth Stratton, 36, was charged with second-degree child abuse, and pleaded no contest to a lesser charge. She was sentenced to probation for maintaining the environment in which the baby was abused.

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Gwinn man to serve 7 to 20 years for raping 14-year-old

Published Thursday, February 22, 2007 3:57:57 PM Central Time

By MARGARET LEVRA

Globe Staff Writer

BESSEMER -- A 41-year-old Gwinn man will serve seven to 20 years in prison for raping a 14-year-old girl at knifepoint.

Michael Dean Peterson was convicted in Gogebic County Circuit Court of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. He was originally charged with two counts of first-degree CSC. In a plea agreement, he pleaded no contest to one of the two counts.

The count carried a penalty of up to life in prison, according to prosecutor Richard Adams.

Gogebic County Circuit Court Judge Roy Gotham said, "Letters on behalf of Mr. Peterson imply that the possibility of innocence should be factored into my sentence. If I thought he was innocent, we wouldn't be sentencing him. I have, rather, to deal with a defendant who is guilty and who committed a horrific crime, the rape of a 14-year-old at knifepoint.

"I give some consideration to the fact that Mr. Peterson has no prior record of any kind by putting the maximum sentence, which by law could be any term of years to life, at 20 years."

Peterson was assessed fees and court costs of \$420. He was given credit for 238 days served in jail.

Peterson addressed the court. "I would like to say I love (girlfriend's name) and her kids and would never intentionally harm her or her kids. We are still very much in love. I am not a violent person, never had problems with the law and would ask

the court to please consider these things."

Based on sentencing guidelines, the Department of Corrections recommended a minimum sentence of 81 to 135 months and recommended Peterson be sentenced at the high end of guidelines.

Public defender James McKenzie argued against the guideline scoring.

Gotham determined guidelines should be scored at a minimum range of 51 to 85 months, after recessing to research several issues, Adams said.

McKenzie asked Gotham sentence Peterson to the low end of guidelines because he "honestly did not recall the incident and had, from the moment he was confronted with the allegations, cooperated with the investigation."

Gogebic County Sheriff's Department Deputy Pete Matonich investigated the incident that occurred on June 9. A woman called the department asking for an officer, indicating her daughter may have been raped by the mother's boyfriend, Adams said.

On investigating, Matonich learned the mother had met Peterson in an Internet chat room and they had been living together for several months.

The night before, the mother and Peterson had been drinking at a local bar and had returned to the mother's apartment. The mother went to sleep, Adams said, while Peterson stayed up, supposedly checking his email on her computer.

Also at home, the victim had gone to her bedroom when the couple returned, Adams said. The next morning, as the mother prepared to go to work, her daughter came into the bathroom appearing to be in shock and shaking.

The victim told her mother she had been strangled and raped at knifepoint during the night.

The mother took the knife from her daughter and returned it to the kitchen and then confronted Peterson, who claimed he did not remember anything like that happening. He told the mother,

however, that if her daughter, who doesn't lie, said that something happened, something must have happened. Peterson encouraged her to call the police, Adams said.

As part of the investigation, the mother's computer was seized as evidence and sent to the Michigan State Police computer crime lab. A technician was able to establish that Peterson's files had been erased, and that someone had visited pornographic sites and downloaded images, including one where a man was strangling a woman as he raped her, Adams said.

At the preliminary exam, the mother had testified Peterson told her he had a "dark side," but had not elaborated.

The computer had to be seized using a search warrant when the mother stopped cooperating with the investigation and started to regularly visit Peterson in jail, Adams said.

Shortly after that occurred, the Department of Human Services intervened and removed the children from the home, Adams said.


Later, the victim's mother admitted to Det. Sgt. Tim Doan of the MSP that she had erased the contents of Peterson's folder, after viewing what it contained, ostensibly because she was afraid that her children would stumble across it, Adams added.

Michigan Report

February 22, 2007

MEDICAID INCENTIVES BILL PASSES **SENATE**

Legislation instituting incentives for Medicaid recipients to engage in healthier behaviors, and thereby cutting state costs, was passed by a unanimous Senate on Thursday.

[SB 1](#)  now goes to the House. Similar legislation had passed the Senate during the 93rd Legislature.

The legislation is part of a larger package to deal with the issue of accessibility health insurance, but the measure deals specifically with the state's Medicaid population.

Under the bill, the Department of Community Health would have to develop a series of incentives for Medicaid recipients to engage in healthier behaviors such as quitting smoking and going to health screenings. Participation in such incentives could earn recipients a break on such things as co-pays and premiums.

The bill also calls for the state to develop a statewide formulary for durable medical equipment just as the state has a formulary for prescription drugs to help keep the costs of that equipment lower.

And the measure also calls for the state to provide financial support for developing electronic health records.

Help needed on Foster Care Review Boards

Niles Daily Star

Thursday, February 22, 2007 10:47 AM EST

SPOTLIGHT OF THE WEEK

Are you seeking a truly unique volunteer opportunity with significant impact on the lives of vulnerable children? Foster Care Review Boards consist of citizen volunteers from all walks of life who are trained by the Michigan Supreme Court to review the cases of children in foster care for reasons of abuse and/or neglect. You do not need to have any experience in this area to serve. Board members review case material prior to meetings and interview legally interested parties. The board formulates findings and recommendations that are then sent back to the courts, agencies, parents, foster parents, attorneys and others. Volunteer board member terms are for three years. Training will be held on April 19 and 20 in Lansing. Mileage and meals are reimbursed when traveling. The local Board serving Berrien and Cass counties meets on the second Tuesday of each month from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. alternating between Cass and Berrien locations.



Assault charges filed in domestic dispute

Friday, February 23, 2007

BENZIE COUNTY -- A man suffered injuries to his head and neck Thursday when his girlfriend attacked him with a hammer after the couple argued about who was going to change their baby's diaper, sheriff's officials said. A 21-year-old woman was charged with felonious assault after deputies were called to the home on Bendon Road about 2:30 a.m. on a domestic violence report. The man declined treatment. The victim and the suspect have lived together for six years and have two children, police said.

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February 23, 2007

Letter

State aid for Abraham a good investment

Those who are upset that the state is paying \$1,200 in housing assistance for Nathaniel Abraham weren't protesting while the state was spending more than \$32,000 a year to keep Abraham locked up. They probably weren't complaining about the \$4.7 million per day that taxpayers pay to keep Michigan's other 51,000 prisoners locked up.

If we're really concerned about saving taxpayer money, then investing in housing for returning prisoners is very economical. Studies show that a single re-entry housing unit for two people saves \$20,000 to \$24,000 a year, compared with the costs of release to a shelter and re-incarceration. And if we're concerned about preventing crime, then providing housing to prisoners upon their transition back to society just makes sense. Research shows that parolees who end up in homeless shelters are seven times more likely to abscond during the first month after release than parolees who have housing.

Miriam Aukerman

Reentry Law Project

Legal Aid of

Western Michigan

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